

Scripture

Lamentations 3:23-33

Psalm 30

Mark 5:21-43

21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." 24 So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." 29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Sermon: Faces of faith

'Do not fear – only believe.' These were Jesus' words to Jairus, the leader of the synagogue when he heard the news that his daughter had died. 'Do not fear – only believe.'

This has echoes of last week's gospel in which Jesus responded to the fear of his disciples as they were thrown about in the sea by a sudden storm.

The theme of that story was that storms will come and storms will go. But Jesus' message in the midst of the chaos is that though we can not avoid the storms, he will never leave our side – we can be secure in his presence. In a world that shakes and heaves, Jesus is our solid foundation, the rock to which we cleave.

This must be a very important theme, because throughout the bible there are almost 150 verses that directly tell us 'do not be afraid, do not worry, or do not be anxious.' My favourite version of the 'do not fear' verses is found in Deuteronomy, when Moses gave Joshua a final blessing as he prepared to lead his people across the Jordan into the promised land. 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.'

In today's reading, Jesus spoke these words to Jairus as his world crumbled around him. 'Do not fear – only believe.'

Let's pick up the story at the beginning. Jairus was a leader in a synagogue, probably in Capernaum. He was respected in his community – a man of good standing. When we first hear of Jairus, though, he is acting in a quite undignified manner. We meet Jairus laying in the dust at the feet of Jesus, begging him to come and lay hands on his daughter, that she might be healed.

This speaks of two things. First, that Jairus loved his daughter deeply. The thought of losing her was enough for him to entirely forget himself and how he appeared in front of his friends and neighbours – he was willing to do anything if it could possibly save her.

Second, Jairus' actions show that he was placing all his hope on the miracle healer from Galilee. Seeing Jairus' great love for his little girl and his faith, Jesus immediately agreed to go see the girl, and off they went with a crowd in tow.

And then something happened. Something that nobody noticed at first, only Jesus. A woman crept up behind Jesus and touched him. Jesus stopped.

The crowd milled around, confused. They thought they were on their way to witness a miracle, and didn't understand what the hold up was.

Then Jesus asked ‘Who touched me?’ Not comprehending, the disciples clamoured ‘What are you talking about? It’s a crowd, everybody’s jostling and bumping. Everybody has touched you. It’s nothing.’

But Jesus insisted ‘I felt power leave me. Someone touched me. Who?’

At this the woman came forward, fell at Jesus’ feet and said ‘It was I, Lord. I touched you.’ And then she told her story.

As this exchange was taking place, some people came from Jairus’ home with the news that his daughter had died. ‘No need to trouble the healer anymore.’ they said.

Imagine being Jairus at that moment. He had found Jesus; he had found hope. They were on their way to cure his little girl, his precious treasure. And then this woman interfered.

She butted in, stopped the show, took Jesus’ attention. And now, the girl was dead. Whose fault was that?

Jairus was first. He found Jesus, he humiliated himself in front of all his townsfolk by groveling in the dirt at Jesus’ feet. He begged, and Jesus responded.

But this woman. This woman. She didn’t beg, she didn’t even ask. She cut in and she took what she wanted. She stole Jairus’ miracle; she took Jairus’ little girls’ life.

This turn of events raises issues of patience vs. pushiness. Jairus did the right things; he sought out Jesus in the right way, and in that moment that he heard his daughter had died I’m sure that he felt cheated – that this woman who didn’t play by the rules got what she wanted while he and his family suffered. I touched on this theme last week as well.

What counts as fair play? Is there a time to be pushy? Are there times in which it is justified to cut into line? And what does this have to do with us today? Are there any situations now where people feel that they’re not ‘getting theirs’ because other people are cutting in line?

I think these verses are incredibly appropriate for just such a time as today.

Immigration. That and trade wars seem to be the hot button topics of the day, though they really are the same issue. Closed economic borders and closed physical borders are merely different facets of the same beast – protectionism.

Protectionism tells us that other people are cutting in line, and they are taking what rightfully belongs to us. There are similar feelings both north and south of the 49th – people are just strolling across the border. They’re taking our jobs, our medicare, our housing, our social assistance.

We can't take care of our own, the story goes, so how can we possibly take care of all these extras? There isn't enough to go around, so close the door and let them go back to where they came from.

23 000 have crossed the border illegally into Canada this year. The Parliamentary Budget Officer just announced that there will be an audit into how much this influx of asylum seekers has cost and will cost the country.

I admit to having mixed feelings as I watched a video of some people coming out of the woods to cross the border between the US and Canada. An RCMP officer was there, clearly telling the people that if they walked across the border they would be arrested. An activist was also there, urging the people to keep walking and not heed what the officer said. Predictably, the activist was outraged when the officer did what he said he would do and was duty bound to do. Both sides seem to want to use these people to make political hay, it would seem.

The grace-filled loving part of me wants to welcome all the lost in, while the legalistic side says 'If you break the law there must be consequences. After all, there are almost eight billion people on the planet and they can't all come to Canada.'

This is the very same tension in today's text. Jairus is the Canadian citizen. He has paid his dues, worked hard, and achieved a respectable social standing. He approached Jesus directly and begged for his help.

The immigrants are the woman. Weak, sick, with no resources, no money, no options, no friends, and most significantly, no name. They butt in line without asking, without due process.

And they take. While thousands are waiting for cancer surgeries, hip replacements, and new hearts, these people are getting access to our health care system. While some Canadians spend years waiting for a subsidized housing placement, these people go to the front of the line.

Along with the issue of undocumented immigrants from abroad we have parallel issues within our borders already. We are already nations within nations. Especially today, on Canada Day, we need to recognize that the First Nations who live among us live much like immigrants, except they were here first. Like the asylum seekers, many are traumatized and broken, without resources, without hope. Many in Canada feel the same way toward the indigenous as the immigrants; if we gave them all that they ask for, there will be nothing left and we will all end up bankrupt.

A lot of people are feeling just like Jairus. They feel cheated of their *just desserts*, what they think they deserve. Last week's theme comes back again.

So, are we justified in how we are feeling? Is it unfair that we have to wait while strangers take what we feel is ours? How did Jairus' story turn out?

After hearing the crushing news that his daughter had died, Jesus said to Jairus 'Do not fear – only believe.' When Jairus had nothing left to hope for, nothing left to live for, Jesus bid him believe.

And then Jesus did something remarkable. He took Jairus back to his home and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Jairus' daughter did not receive a healing at the hands of Jesus. She received a resurrection. Jairus thought that he had been cheated, but instead he received an even bigger miracle.

In telling Jairus to believe, Jesus was inviting him to step from his own kingdom into God's kingdom. Remember last week when I talked about the two kingdoms, and how though our kingdom crumbles, God's kingdom endures? Indeed, our kingdom must crumble before we can enter God's kingdom.

The parallels this week run all the way through the text. God's answer to Job, in my paraphrase, was 'Yes your tower has fallen. But mine never will. I am still with you.'

Likewise, Jesus' answer to Jairus 'Do not fear – only believe.' Jesus was saying 'Don't you understand? This tragedy has befallen you, but you don't have anything to worry about. I am still here with you.'

In Jairus' mind it was all wrong. The timing was wrong – his girl was dead. The unfolding of circumstance was wrong – that dirty, pushy woman stepped out of her boundaries and messed everything up. It was too late for a miracle.

But in the same way that God answered Job by pointing out that Job's understanding was too limited, Jesus demonstrated to Jairus that his worldly thinking was too small for God's kingdom. Man's kingdoms are limited by time. The Eternal Heavenly Kingdom stands outside of time.

Man's kingdom is most certainly limited by death. Not so in Christ's kingdom.

God's answer is the same in both stories. 'Your finite kingdom has collapsed, but mine never will. And where is it that you truly live – in your illusory kingdom or in my eternal one?'

The truth is that we live in a country of immigrants; at one time we were all poor, desperate people with few options and little to offer. We came here in waves. Currently immigrants are coming from Central and South America and the Caribbean Islands, as well as from Muslim Middle East and North Africa. In the eighties Vietnamese and Sri Lankans, in the sixties more than 130 000 Portuguese, in the fifties 37 000 Hungarians, 250 000 from Europe during the war years, Italians in the 20's, Dutch around the turn of the century, 170 000 Scots in the mid 1800's, and the English and French before that.

Even the indigenous who share their home with us are immigrants; the native people who live here now are not the same nations that were here 2000 years ago, and ultimately their ancestors came from across the Bering strait.

As each wave of newcomers arrived, many thought that they would overload the system and cause the downfall of all. Each new group was resented by those who had come before. Each new group was declared to be a collection of criminals and low-lives who had created their own misfortune and should be abandoned to their own fates.

It seems that nothing has really changed at all. As we face a new influx of immigrants, we ask ourselves if we as a nation can sustain this influx of poor wretched people. Can we afford to let go of the laws and structures that limit the flow and just accept who comes? Do we risk letting the floodgates open?

I don't know. By worldly standards it does look pretty daunting. But what if we listen to the words of Jesus. 'Do not be afraid – only believe.' What if we just love and care for the ones that God places before us and trust that God will show up, as God has promised.

Jairus was overwhelmed, and Jesus stepped into the gap. God's ways are above our ways; God's understanding is above our understanding. What is impossible for man, is more than possible with God. So let's take a leap of faith and cross the threshold between kingdoms; let's move from our restrictive kingdoms into God's expansive kingdom, from self interest to loving our neighbour, and in so doing move from fear into hope.

Amen.